DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 327 314 PS 019 323

AUTHOR Pellegrini, A. D.; Glickman, Carl D.
TITLE Measuring Kindergartners' Social Competence. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, Urbana, Ill.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO EDO-PS-91-3
PUB DATE 91
CONTRACT RI88062012
NOTE 3p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Practices; *Interpersonal Competence; *Kindergarten; *Kindergarten Children; *Measurement Techniques; Primary Education
IDENTIFIERS ERIC Digests; Research Results

ABSTRACT

This ERIC Digest advocates assessment of children's social competence with various measures, including behavioral measures, peer nominations, teacher ratings, and standardized tests. Content focuses on: (1) the insufficiency of the use of academic tests alone; (2) the importance of observing children's interactions with peers; (3) research evidence; and (4) implications. Since tests provide limited data, the accurate assessment of kindergarten children requires the use of different perspectives. The method of observing and recording peer interaction during free play seems to yield particularly relevant results. It must be noted that the prediction of success in the first grade from kindergarten experience requires the investment of time and money. Perhaps some of the time and money now spent on standardized tests should be spent on social competence testing. (RH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED327314

ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education
University of Illinois
805 West Pennsylvania Avenue
Urbana, Illinois 61801
(217) 333-1386

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY Anthony Pellegrini TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ERIC Digest

EDO-PS-91-3

PS 019323

Measuring Kindergartners' Social Competence

A.D. Pellegrini and Carl D. Glickman

At different ages, children develop different competencies. The competence hallmark for kindergartners is the development of peer interaction skills (Waters and Sroufe, 1983). Over time, these peer-interaction skills are transformed into other related competencies. For example, kindergarten children's social and dramatic play develops into traditional literacy (Pellegrini, 1985). Therefore, both social (for example, peer interaction) and cognitive (for example, reading achievement) measures should be used to assess kindergartners.

This digest advocates assessment of children's social competence, of which performance on achievement tests is only a small part. *Social competence* is the degree to which children adapt to their school and home environments. Social competence in young children is best assessed with a combination of measures—behavioral measures, peer nominations, teacher ratings, and standardized tests.

Why Academic Tests Are Not Enough

The argument for assessing social competence continues because of the over-reliance on academically oriented standardized tests. One method, which follows Zigler and Trickett (1978) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children's position statement on standardized testing of 3- to 8-year-olds (1988), includes assessment of both school achievement and peer relations as predictors of first grade achievement. Both these domains are important, interdependent measures of adaptation to school. The assessment of social competence calls for the use of observational data, teacher rating scales, peer nomination measures, and standardized tests. In short, multiple assessment measures are needed, particularly for decisions about grade retention or assignment to special classes.

Assessment of Social Competence

Assessment of children's social competence requires observation of children interacting with peers. While classrooms can be used to study such relationships, a playground maximizes opportunities for peer interactions, minimizes the chances of teacher involvement, and provides children with a greater amount of play. Children generally like to be on the playground with peers and typically exhibit high levels of competence (Waters and Sroufe, 1983). For example, tag—a game allowed on the playground but not in the classroom—elicits rule-governed behavior, the kind expected in classrooms and in society in general. Children try to play such games well because they want to sustain interaction with peers. Thus, children show their competence.

Research Evidence

In a recent study, 35 children of lower and middle socioeconomic status were observed on their school playground at recess through both their kindergarten and first grades. Classroom teachers assessed the children with two standardized tests: The Metropolitan Readiness Test (MRT) in kindergarten and the Georgia Criterion-Referenced Test in first grade. Children's playground behavior were observed and their peer-nominated sociometric status assessed. Teachers rated children's personalities for both years. (See Pellegrini, 1988, for technical details of data collection.)

The results indicated a number of important things. First, although kindergartners' MRT scores were a significant predictor of first grade achievement, they explained only 36% of the variance in children's first grade achievement scores. Therefore, 64% of first grade achievement was due to factors other than those measured by the MRT. When observed behavior, peer nomination, and teacher rating scales were included, 75% of first grade achievement was predicted.

The behavioral data present a clear picture: Passive children (those who are adult-directed and noninteractive) are less competent than peer-oriented children who engage in social games with rules. Games may predict achievement because the social interaction characteristic of games taps a number of linguistic, social, and cognitive dimensions that are incorporated into later achievement. For example, the ability to use reasoned arguments in games necessitates the use of language forms that characterize tests and school literacy lessons (Pellegrini, Galda, and Rubin, 1984).

The most reliable assessment contexts seem to be those in which children are comfortable and have opportunities to exhibit their competence. Measures taken in such contexts are more accurate predictors of first grade achievement than standardized achievement test scores.

We have tried to predict children's first grade social skills based on teacher-rated personality and peer-nominated popularity in kindergarten. These criteria for first graders' competence were included because of the often made, and valid, criticism that evaluation of primary school children does not include social and affective components (Haney, 1978). Too often only cognition is assessed. The job of schools is to develop good citizens. The ability to get along with peers and to act prosocially—as well as the ability to read—are important components of a democratic education.

We found that children's aggressive or passive interactive behavior in kindergarten predicted their antisocial personality in first grade. These predictors give us insight into behavioral dimensions of psychopathology in young children, because aggression may predict an antisocial personality, or other externalizing problems, and passive interaction may predict a neurotic personality, or other internalizing problems.

What a child does in games with rules predicts popularity. In games with rules, children must exhibit the social and cognitive skills necessary for popularity (Dodge, Petit, McClaskey, and Brown, 1986). In other words, they must possess and use the skills needed to analyze social interaction. Children who possess these skills are popular.

Implications

The implications are clear. First, if kindergartners are to be accurately assessed, they must be assessed from different perspectives. Their engagement in peer interaction during free play seems to yield particularly relevant results.

Second, we stress that tests provide limited data. Although kindergartners' test scores predict their first grade achievement, they do not tell most of the story. More of the story is told with more natural assessment techniques.

Third, if first grade success is to be successfully predicted from kindergarten experience, time and money will have to be invested. Granted, observations are expensive, but so are remedial programs. Observations of children should be conducted weekly for each child. We realize that teachers, administrators, and aides already have too much to do, and that the advocating of more assessment may frustrate them. These weekly observations, however, typically take less than one minute per child. Similarly, the personality scale done midway in the school year takes about 10 minutes per child.

Perhaps the time and money now spent on standardized tests should be spent differently—half as much on academic testing, with some money spent on social competence testing. It is probably cheaper to make the investment needed to spot potentially serious problems in kindergarten than to spend money later on juvenile detention homes and unemployment checks. No measurement of *anything* will cure society's ills, but assessment of kindergartners' social competence may be a step in the right direction.

This digest was adapted from an article titled, "Measuring Kindergartners' Social Competence," by A.D. Pellegrini and Carl D. Glickman, which appeared in *Young Children* (May, 1990): 40-44.

For More Information:

Dodge, K., Petit, G., McClaskey, and Brown, M. *Social Competence in Children. Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 51 (2, Serial No. 213), 1986.

Haney, W. *ESEA Title I Early Childhood Education:* Review of Literature on Evaluation and Instrumentation. Interim Report to the U.S. Office of Education, 1978.

National Association for the Education of Young Children. "NAEYC Position Statement on Standardized Testing of Young Children 3 through 8 Years of Age." *Young Children*, 43(3) (1988): 42-47.

Pellegrini, A. "Elementary School Children's Rough-and-Tumble Play and Social Competence." *Developmental Psychology*, 24 (1988): 802-806.

Pellegrini, A. "The Relations between Symbolic Play and Literate Behavior: A Review and Critique of the Empirical Literature." *Review of Educational Research*, 55 (1985): 207-221.

Pellegrini, A., Galda, L., and Rubin, D. "Context in Text: The Development of Oral and Written Language in Two Genres." *Child Development*, 55 (1984): 1549-1555.

Pellegrini, A.D. and Glickman, Carl D. "Measuring Kindergartners' Social Competence." *Young Children* (May, 1990): 40-44.

Waters, E. and Sroufe, L. "Social Competence as a Developmental Construct." *Developmental Review*, 3 (1983): 79-97.

Zigler, E., and Trickett, P. "I.Q., Social Competence, and Evaluation of Early Childhood Intervention Programs." *American Psychologist*, 33 (1978): 789-798.

This publication was funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education under contract no. OERI 88-062012. Opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI. ERIC digests are in the public domain and may be freely reproduced and disseminated.